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Use of a Climate and Culture Survey to Assess Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Initiatives at the VCU School of Social Work

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USE OF A CLIMATE AND CULTURE SURVEY TO ASSESS DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION INITIATIVES AT THE VCU SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

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Project Sponsors: Beth Angell, Dean and Professor, School of Social Work and Rebecca Gomez, Associate Dean for Academic and Student Affairs, Associate Professor, School of Social Work

PROJECT ABSTRACT

The project aimed to create a survey to assess the effectiveness of previously implemented diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) initiatives, specifically racial equity at the VCU School of Social Work. The VCU School of Social Work has been actively working with their faculty and staff to address DEI at their school and encourage them to become active in DEI initiatives in other areas in the community. School of Social Work leadership was looking for a way to assess if those DEI initiatives met their intended purpose. This project researched ways to assess the effectiveness of DEI initiatives. The result was the creation of an electronic survey distributed to School of Social Work faculty and staff in the fall of 2021.

RACIAL EQUITY

On January 25, 2021, the VCU School of Social Work released a statement addressing their collective commitment to racial and social justice. It openly acknowledged that over its 100 year history, it has “perpetuated, reinforced, and benefitted from white dominance” and that the school is “interwoven with larger, historically rooted ideologies and structures of oppression. “Faculty, staff, and students brought their concerns to the leadership of the School who subsequently started internal processes of self-reflection and understanding. Faculty, staff, and student leadership began to work together to develop ways to acknowledge and learn from the past to foster an environment that ensures ongoing systemic review, change to address and dismantle anti-black racism, and commitment to (1) engage in truth-telling and reflection regarding the global and local history of racism, (2) hold one another accountable for systemic racism and structural oppression, (3) prioritize anti-racism work in curriculum, policy, and practices, (4) resist efforts that silence ways to communicate the anti-racism message, (5) develop as a school that holds all members to continued growth and education to dismantle racial oppression, (6) hold the University accountable to these same ideals, and (7) create an education and work environment that decenters whiteness in our everyday practices.

In response, the School of Social Work created a working group, the Radical Alliances for Anti-Racism, Change and Equality (RAACE) comprised of faculty, staff and 6 student fellows in 2020. This group is in line with the VCU School of Social Work's commitment to Racial and Social Justice as outlined above, the following initiatives have been implemented since 2020:

- Curriculum Workgroup
- Facilitating student awareness and supporting utilization of Equity and Access - complaint process and VCU helpline
- RAACE (The Radical Alliance for Anti-Racism, Change, and Equity)
- RAACE Student Fellowships
- Review of due process procedures
- SSW Racial and Social Justice Commitment Statement
- Student Climate Work Group - revised student climate survey to reflect student input
- Required inter-group dialogue training for senior leadership team
- Required iExcel Gender: Beyond the Binary for all faculty and staff
- Inclusive Teaching Fellowships, seminars, brown bags
- Search committee training and inclusion of Recruitment Inclusive Champions as search committee members or consultants

It was important to the School of Social Work to understand the impact, perception, and success of these initiatives as a way to foster the school's commitment to racial and social justice. Therefore, a climate and culture survey was developed to assess the perceptions of faculty and staff. Specifically, the survey focused on proactivity of the initiatives, opportunities for advancement, whether the actions develop a sense of community, and meet expected code of conduct. Additionally, surveying provides an opportunity for all faculty and staff to privately convey their satisfaction or dissatisfaction and provide detailed feedback on the climate. Ideally, the results of this project can be used to evaluate the initiatives that were implemented and build off of them or improve on their quality and effectiveness for ongoing DEI efforts.

QUEST 2025

This project related most directly to theme IV of Quest 2025:

Theme IV: Diversity Driving Excellence – *Translate our value philosophy of diversity and inclusion into practices related to excellence and success:* The School of Social Work has been dismantling its culture with an eye to acknowledging past participation in oppression. Driving excellence through promoting and expecting beneficence and respect has directly led to the development of RAACE. The goal of RAACE is to decentralize traditional structures of privilege and power, trickle up social justice, anti-racist practice and building community through an ethic of care.

IV.1: Advance institutional excellence through a commitment to diversity, inclusion, and equity fostered through a culture of appreciation and respect: As outlined above, RAACE has already developed many initiatives and is now at the point to assess their effectiveness and perceptions from faculty and staff. This assessment is needed to continue and improve on their efforts to advance their work in promoting this theme. The climate and culture survey developed during this project is an important step in this process.

IV.2: Build and sustain the infrastructure to enhance diversity, inclusion, and equity at all levels of the university to support teaching, research, scholarship, creative expression, and service.

IV.3: Establish diversity as an imperative in the development and implementation of strategies and policies and in decisions regarding resource allocation. The School of Social Work considers itself a leader and strives for excellence in DEI. Their DEI initiatives for faculty and staff are in place to foster interest in serving the urban and regional community.

PROJECT GOALS

The goals of the project were as follows:

- To develop a survey tool to assess DEI initiative effectiveness at the VCU School of Social Work
- To use information gathered from the survey tool to improve and grow DEI initiatives

This project should be implemented because it could provide a mechanism for other schools to assess their DEI initiative effectiveness. Specifically, the survey allows faculty and staff to provide anonymous feedback about the current DEI initiatives. The feedback can then be used by school leadership to determine if there are areas within the current DEI initiatives that could be improved. Additionally, the feedback may provide insight into new initiatives that would further enhance the school's current efforts.

PROJECT STRATEGIES

The group's strategy to approaching this project included the following areas: Research, Design, Revision, Execution, and Evaluation.

Research: The first action item for the group was to investigate literature and information to see if others had attempted a similar type of project in the past. Interestingly, there are numerous studies and websites that point to the need for developing DEI initiatives at higher institutional levels but only a select few published studies looking at implementation and effectiveness. One study from the University of North Carolina assessed faculty and staff regarding their DEI efforts and a large study from multiple higher education institutions in Europe (INVITED Project group) looked to assess the effectiveness and information from DEI initiatives. All came to similar conclusions that assessing DEI is necessary, complex, and takes time. We used the survey conducted by UNC as a template to build our survey

Design: Next, our group worked on developing a climate and culture survey tool for the School of Social Work. After reviewing the literature, the group felt that an electronic survey format would be most appropriate. This was drafted, reviewed and revised with School of Social Work leadership (Drs. Angell and Gomez). Further, we were challenged by the fact that the target study population consisted of many 9-month faculty who were going to be off campus and not as available during the summer when the bulk of the work of survey development occurred.

Ultimately, the survey we devised utilized a Likert scale, with seven levels (1=Very Dissatisfied, 5=Very Satisfied, 6=Unsure and 7=Not Applicable). Text boxes for free-responses were also included to obtain additional feedback. In total, the survey included 26 questions grouped into the following categories:

- Satisfaction of SSW efforts towards DEI (5 questions),
- Perception of SSW actions to increase professional opportunities (7 questions),
- Perception of SSW actions to develop a sense of community (7 questions),
- Perception of SSW actions to foster a safe and ethical environment(6 questions),
- Demographics (1 question).

Revision: There were two components of the revision process. After completing a rough draft, our group engaged leaders at the School of Social Work to help us refine the survey. The second revision process came after a pilot of the survey was administered from August 30 to September 10, 2021 to members of the School of Social Work RAACE team. The pilot survey was used to determine if revisions (e.g. changes to wording to make questions clear, fixing typographical errors) were needed before sending out the final survey to all School of Social Work faculty and staff.

Execution: Six responses were received from the pilot survey allowing the team to update the survey based on feedback and to assess the overall validity and reliability of the survey. Due to the concern that we would have limited faculty availability during the summer the full survey, distribution was delayed until fall 2021 (September 17th).

Evaluation: A formal evaluation and analysis of survey results will occur in early October and be incorporated into the final presentation.

ACTION STEPS

1. Data Analysis

- a. Once the final survey results are returned, we will have better understanding of faculty and staffs
 - i. Perceptions of the effectiveness of efforts of the School of Social Work's and RAACE towards DEI initiatives
 - ii. Better understand opportunities for advancement
 - iii. Determine whether faculty and staff feel that the current DEI initiatives develop a sense of community

2. Should another group want to bring a similar project to fruition, the following are steps to follow:

- a. Tailor survey to the organization wanting feedback
- b. Decide the best mechanism to deliver the survey (e.g. electronic, paper, etc.)
- c. Consider distributing a pilot survey prior to an audience with demographic similarities to your target population
 - i. From the respondents' feedback and comments make improvements to the final survey
- d. Collaborate with sponsor for the best time and place for delivering the survey in order to obtain as high of a response rate as possible
- e. Distribute final survey to target population
- f. Analyze data after survey has been administered and review results

OUTCOMES

Pilot Survey: Six individuals completed the survey pilot. Of these respondents, only four answered the demographic question indicating at least one respondent was adjunct faculty and three respondents were term faculty. Feedback was provided that led to revisions before the distribution of the final survey. The overall intended outcomes of this project are to improve the DEI efforts at the School of Social Work by using the results of the final survey to design further initiatives and review and refine previous initiatives.

SUSTAINABILITY

This is an easily sustainable project and can be applicable to larger or smaller units. While this survey was implemented at the school level, it could also be used by departments, committees, or other organizational groups.

FINANCING AND RESOURCES:

While there is very limited financing and resource to carry out the study, there is considerable time commitment needed for ongoing survey development, data acquisition, data analysis, report generation. Further ongoing support is needed and a solution would be for a RAACE data analysis. This individual would be responsible for working with RAACE to assess current projects, develop targeted survey or other instruments needed to assess effectiveness (develop focus groups of faculty and staff). These data can also be considered pilot data for potential grant

funding to develop further DEI initiatives in the School. It may also be a good pilot source for funding a potential fellowship training program in these efforts.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This is limited at this time due to insufficient data but we certainly hope that the full survey to faculty will provide the School of Social Work useful data to use to plan and improve further DEI projects. Barriers we encountered with the survey was difficulty to pilot and test during the summer when most of the faculty are away and school leadership was concerned for poor response. Thus, the timeline for the project did not practically align for when survey participants can be available. However, we do anticipate good response from faculty this fall with the full survey and it will take minimal resource to review the data. Minimal resource will be required to analyze the project.

FINAL PITCH

Development of a key survey tool to obtain faculty assessment of the School of Social Work DEI initiatives is vital for the ongoing success of this important initiative and its contributions to Quest 2025. Results of the survey will provide the school's leadership with keen insight into the effectiveness of their efforts and how to continue to improve and maintain progress.

Appraisal of the School of Social Work Staff and Faculty Climate and Culture

Sponsored by the VCU School of Social Work



Team 2



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- ❖ Joanna Bell, School of Education
- ❖ Rucha Bond, School of Pharmacy
- ❖ Keara Chambers, College of Engineering
- ❖ David Edwards, College of Humanities and Sciences
- ❖ Melissa Jamerson, College of Health Professions
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Team Sponsors



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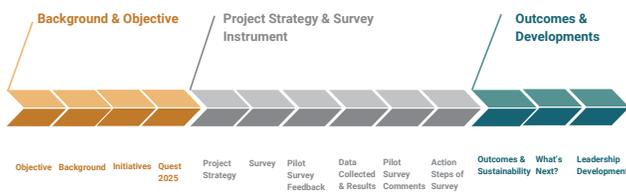


Key Definitions

- Diversity
- Equity
- Inclusion
- Individual/Person Racism
- Institutional Racism
- Racial Equity
- Racial Inequity
- Social Equity
- Stakeholders



Agenda



Mission Statement: School of Social Work

"The mission of the VCU School of Social Work is to prepare professional social workers as practitioners, scholars and leaders; to generate research and scholarship for advancing knowledge and practice; and to contribute to the local, state, national, international and professional communities to improve quality of life.

Guided by the principle of promoting social and economic justice in a diverse and multicultural society, our programs focus on service to and empowerment of people who experience oppression or vulnerability due to inadequate or inequitable distribution of personal, social or institutional resources"



Objective

School of Social Work leadership was looking for a way to assess the effectiveness of implemented DEI initiatives with a focus on racial diversity within their school and if their DEI initiatives met their intended purposes.

- The results of this project will be used to evaluate the initiatives and gauge how to move forward.
- Enable them to make data informed decisions for cultural and structural shifts with a focus on racial justice and healing.
- Looking for paths forward, what was working, not working and what is needed.



Background



Members of the school's Radical Alliance for Anti-Racism, Change and Equity (RAACE) meet on Zoom.

Photo source: VCU SoSW RAACE site

- The School of Social Work's RAACE (Radical Alliances for Anti-Racism, Change, and Equality) was formed in 2020 to address Racial injustice – past and present – in social work.
 - Goal of RAACE was to shift from a trauma reactive approach to a healing & proactive centered approach.
- Assessing various parts of the school and develop recommendations for cultural and structural shifts with a focus on racial justice and healing.
 - Includes representation from staff, faculty, students, alumni and adjunct instructors.



School of Social Work Initiatives

1. Required RAACE to build relationships based on trust, as well as a common language and processes
2. Consensus-based decision-making strategies.
 - a. This allowed them to practice examine the ways that other forms of decision-making can silence or dismiss voices that are often marginalized in institutional settings
3. Ways RAACE engaged the School community
 - a. Holding space
 - b. School Assembly updates
 - c. Special Assembly



Quest 2025

- This project related to the theme of Quest 2025: Together We Transform:
 - Theme IV: Diversity driving excellence (subtheme IV.1 and IV.3).
- The School of Social Work will use the information from this project to encourage their faculty and staff to engage in the following theme:
 - Theme II: Collective urban and regional transformation

The School of Social Work strives both for excellence in DEI and also for their DEI initiatives for faculty and staff to foster interest in serving the urban and regional community.

[https://quest.vcu.edu/media/quest/assets/005154-01_BOV%20Executive%20Summary%20\(1\)%20\(1\).pdf](https://quest.vcu.edu/media/quest/assets/005154-01_BOV%20Executive%20Summary%20(1)%20(1).pdf)



Project Strategy

Our group's strategy to approaching this project includes the following areas:

Background Research: Review of literature, interviews, discussions

Design: Creating a survey and process based on previous literature.

Revision: Piloting survey to refine content and verbiage.

Execution: Surveying the School of Social Work faculty and staff.

Evaluation: Analyzing results and reviewing them with the School of Social Work



Survey

The focus areas in this survey include

- diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives,
- opportunities for advancement,
- sense of community,
- demographics,
- and an opportunity to provide additional feedback.



Pilot Feedback on Survey

- Survey piloted with the VCU School of Social Work Radical Alliance for Anti-Racism, Change, and Equity (RAACE) Task Force from August 30 - September 10, 2021
- Survey feedback
 - Wording revisions for clarity
 - Grammar and spelling corrections
 - Positive feedback on scope and content of survey
 - Recommendations for optional versus required questions
- Survey feedback will be incorporated before full dissemination



Data Collected & Results

- Six individuals completed the survey pilot
 - Only four responded to demographic question (1 adjunct faculty, 3 term faculty)
- Likert scale: 1-7 (with 6=Unsure and 7=Not Applicable)
- Survey questions were grouped:
 - Rate satisfaction of SSW efforts towards DEI
 - Rate perception of SSW actions to increase professional opportunities
 - Rate perception of SSW actions to develop a sense of community
 - Rate perception of SSW actions to foster a safe and ethical environment



Example Survey Questions

1) Please rate your satisfaction with the School's efforts in areas of DEI for faculty.
*most probable value
 very dissatisfied dissatisfied Moderate satisfied very satisfied Not sure
 Not applicable reset
 Choose one

2) Please rate your satisfaction with the School's efforts in areas of DEI for staff.
*most probable value
 very dissatisfied dissatisfied Moderate satisfied very satisfied Not sure
 Not applicable reset
 Choose one

3) Please rate your satisfaction with the School's efforts in areas of DEI for students.
*most probable value
 very dissatisfied dissatisfied Moderate satisfied very satisfied Not sure
 Not applicable reset
 Choose one

4) Please rate your satisfaction with the trajectory of the School's DEI initiatives.
*most probable value
 very dissatisfied dissatisfied Moderate satisfied very satisfied Not sure
 Not applicable reset
 Choose one

5) Describe additional efforts that would lead you to endorse DEI initiatives:
*most probable value



Example Results - Satisfaction of DEI Efforts

- The school's efforts are proactive in the area of DEI for faculty:
 - 2 Dissatisfied, 2 Moderate, 1 Very Satisfied, 1 Not Sure
- The school's efforts are proactive in the area of DEI for staff:
 - 2 Dissatisfied, 2 Moderate, 1 Very Satisfied, 1 Not Sure
- The school's efforts are proactive in the area of DEI for students:
 - 1 Dissatisfied, 3 Moderate, 1 Very Satisfied, 1 Not Sure
- How satisfied are you that the DEI initiatives are heading in the right trajectory?
 - 1 Dissatisfied, 2 Moderate, 1 Satisfied, 2 Very Satisfied



Pilot Survey Comments

- Respondent feedback was generally positive regarding the pilot survey
 - "This was helpful and I look forward to hearing how the data will be used for change."
- Pilot offered an opportunity to revise the survey based on feedback regarding wording and typos



Action Steps of Survey

Should another group want to bring a similar project to fruition, the following are steps to follow:

1. Tailor survey to the organization wanting feedback
2. Decide the best mechanism to deliver the survey (electronic, paper, etc)
3. Consider distributing a pilot survey prior to an audience with demographic similarities to your target population
 - a. As you see fit, the respondents feedback and comments should be considered and reflected in the final survey
4. Collaborate with sponsor for the best time and place for delivering the survey in order to obtain as high of a response rate as possible
5. Distribute final survey to target population
6. Analyze data after survey has been administered and review results



Outcomes & Sustainability

- Intended outcomes are to improve DEI at the VCU School of Social Work by using the results of the survey to design further initiatives and review and refine previous initiatives.
- This is an easily sustainable project and can be applicable to larger or smaller units. While this survey was implemented at the school level, it could also be used by departments, committees, or other organizational groups.
- Limited funding and resources are needed for future implementation of this project.



What's Next?

September 2021

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30		

October 2021

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31

1. Survey launched: Friday September 17th
1. Survey closed: Friday October 1st
1. Data analyzed
1. Next - Share results/review feedback so that the SoSW can determine if their DEI efforts would benefit from updates and/or additional initiatives.



What we learned and observed during the process



Process - Virtual meetings twice a month, virtual meetings and email communication with team sponsors, literature review

Communication was essential for this project.

Lessons - Strong leadership within our team, benefits of in-person meetings, benefits of virtual meetings, importance of organizational skills, teamwork, and communication

Continued efforts and initiatives are required to improve DEI and racial equity. Regular evaluations of these tools are essential. Honest feedback allows for growth.

<https://sloanreview.mit.edu/article/leadership-mindsets-for-the-new-economy/>



Acknowledgements

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Questions?



Thank you for joining us today and your support

